

Joint Senior Enlisted Public Affairs Course 010-13

29 Oct - 14 Nov 2012

Kirby's Ten Commandments

"Carry private conscience into public office."

—Theodore Roosevelt

- I. Thou shalt act as if you were at grandmother's table. If you wouldn't say it or do it in front of her, don't do it or say it at all. You are a public figure and always "on."
- II. Thou shalt consider each person a reporter. This doesn't mean you should lose all candor, but you must be prepared to see everything you say repeated somewhere. You won't know if the person with whom you are speaking has a blog or keeps a journal. And not everyone understands the meaning of "off the record."
- III. Thou shalt be careful with whom you associate and where you speak. How you spend your time sends a message. Be selective.
- **IV.** Thou shalt maintain the dignity of the office. It's a fine line to walk, remaining accessible while preserving the mystique of the position. Don't be afraid to consider some things unworthy of your time. Learn to say, "no, thanks." Again, be selective.
- V. Thou shalt remember the power in an image. A picture really does say a thousand words. Use this knowledge to tell the story you want told. Remember it as well to help keep you situationally aware. Are you comfortable being photographed doing what you're doing?
- VI. Thou shalt not dispute in public—unless, of course you are witnessing a law being broken or a safety violation. Let the staff convey your misgivings. If you must disagree with someone, try a line like this: "You know, you could try it that way, but let me tell you what I've seen work really well in the past."
- VII. Thou shalt remember that whatever follows the "but" or "however" in a sentence is always the most important part of that sentence. Watch how reporters use this technique to reveal their bias. Use it yourself to better convey your meaning. See above.
- **VIII.** Thou shalt never let your superiors read your advice in the newspaper. In fact, you should never publicly discuss your personal counsel at *any* time or in *any* forum.
- **IX.** Thou shalt not have a bad day. Remember that for most of the people you meet, it will be their first and only encounter with you. They don't care about your troubles. Leave them only good things to remember about you.
- **X. Thou shalt be thyself.** An audience can smell insincerity faster than you think.

—George Washington

[&]quot;Be courteous to all, but intimate with few, and let those few be well tried before you give them your confidence."



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Kirby's Rules

Always be:

1. Skeptical

Don't be afraid to question policies or programs. You have to be the sanity check. If it doesn't make sense to you, you are going to have a hard time communicating it. Worse, it may be a bad policy.

2. Courteous

Treat everyone you encounter as if they were at your grandmother's dinner table.

3. Professional

When you became a PAO you gave up your right to make public your personal views. You are always a spokesman ... always.

4. Able to take two steps back

It's all about context. Find ways to put things into perspective. That's what we do.

5. Right

We can't afford to pass bad information ... ever.

6. Responsive

Get the phone before it rings three times. Respond promptly to emails, even if it's just to tell someone you got their note. Give out your home number. Make sure people can reach you at all times.

7. Engaged

Let people see you; let them know you are informed and interested in what they are doing.

8. Curious

Ask lots of questions; be willing to learn no matter how long you have been at any command. You are never as smart as you think you are, and no one cares how well you did it the last time.

9. Circumspect

People have to know they can trust you with information, both at the command and in the media. Know when to speak up and when not to. Be trustworthy.

10. Yourself

Don't try to fit someone's mold. Be true to who you are and let that reflect in your work. A phony PAO can be spotted—and *distrusted*—a mile away.

11. Able to laugh

Take the work seriously—very seriously—but not yourself. Some days, a sense of humor will be all that gets you through.

12. Physically Fit

You represent the military. Look the part. Wear your uniform smartly. Besides, being in shape is good for stress. And if you're doing the job right, you'll have plenty of stress to cope with.